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ABSTRACT

Much of the institutional research conducted at Harcum Junior College, a private women's college, has focused on measuring the educational outcomes of students in relation to the college's objectives. Past studies have sought to determine how well Harcum prepares transfer curriculum students by analyzing rates of baccalaureate degree attainment, acceptance rates at senior institutions, and academic performance at senior institutions as compared to performance at Harcum. Follow-up studies have been conducted to determine how well graduates have been prepared for employment by looking at rates of immediate successful employment and salaries. Another area of investigation has been the extent to which general and career education have been made compatible, and the extent to which these programs prove relevant to later life activities. Studies of withdrawal rates have revealed consistently high levels of school holding power, and an inquiry into the ability of Harcum graduates to think critically revealed a substantial improvement that was attributable to attending the school. Still another educational outcome of concern relates to student life and their evaluation of their college experience. These studies and others indicate that viewed in terms of the articulation of its graduates into the community, Harcum College has evidenced a record of effective results. (MB)

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EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AT HARCUM JUNIOR COLLEGE

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Educational Outcomes At Harcum Junior College

The Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, in its 1970 document - "Two Year Colleges" - noted that .... "ultimately there are only two questions which need to be asked about a two-year college, or any other institution: 'Has it clearly defined objectives which are appropriate to higher education, and to its potential? Second, how well does it achieve them?'"

These comments focus attention upon the key dimension of <u>educational renewal</u>. In the words of former federal Commissioner of Eduation James Allen, such renewal seeks ... "to change attitudes, to throw off inhibiting tradition, and to be willing to experiment and explore new methods and direction." In short, such flexibility would evidence a willingness to adapt to change.

Ten years ago at Harcum Junior College, the Faculty Assembly and College Council approved a statement of objectives which included, among others, the following:

... Harcum's primary purpose is to prepare students to take their chosen place in today's world, equipped not only with necessary academic and career skills, but also with self and social awareness.
... To provide transfer programs paralleling those offered in the first two years of four-year collegiate programs of study.
... Offer career preparation programs, equipping individuals to become contributing members of the working world.
... The College seeks to prepare its students for their roles as family members and workers, as well as productive citizens of a community.
... At the heart of a Harcum education is a concern for <u>each</u> individual.
... Offers a balance of general education and career-oriented courses in programs of study.

<u>Assessing Outcomes</u>

A number of years ago, Professor David Reisman of Harvard suggested that... "a college must be tested by its products, the most obvious being its alumni." At Harcum, such 'testing' has been as essential element of an on-going self-evaluation (institutional research) program which the College has vigorously sponsored since 1968.

To what extent has Harcum achieved its stated objectives? Has it been

'on target' in its academic and academic collateral program offerings? Seeking meaningful answers to such questions is what the Middle States Commission on Higher Education describes as ... "the deciding factor in assessing any institution."

Over the past fifteen years, Harcum has been steadily maturing as a viable learning center for young women. It has constantly questioned the outcomes of its programming efforts, systematically gathering and assessing information through institutional research inquiries and in-depth studies. Essentially, it has sought to answer one very important question: "What has been accomplished?"

To begin to answer this question a second one must be asked? "After Harcum - what?" Among others, the College has offered curriculums which parallel the first two years of a typical four-year program; (the so-called 'transfer' curricula: e.g. liberal arts, medical technology, education, animal technology, pre-nursing, etc.). In addition, career-oriented programs of study are offered which may lead to immediate employment, (e.g. secretarial, retail merchandising, optometric assistant, medical laboratory assistant, fashion design, etc.).

Just how well does Harcum prepare the 'transfer' curriculum students? One follow-up study, reported in a 1971 article, revealed among 43 transfer curriculum graduates, striking differences when their rate of transfer acceptance was compared with that of the 1962 through 1970 Harcum graduates who responded to alumnae questionnaire surveys. The 43 transfer curriculum graduates reported 79% earning baccalaureate degrees. This contrasts sharply with the 22% rate reported from among the 1962-1970 Harcum graduate-respondents. Equally striking was the 52% of the 'transfer' group who reported working for their masters degrees, for only 11% of the 1962-1970 respondents so indicated!

The above information does suggest that Harcum graduates completing 'trans-

fer' curricula do achieve a valuable, interim educational outcome. In the main, they receive a two-year collegiate preparation which effectively helps them to successfully articulate into a four-year collegiate program. During the decade 1968-1977, an annual average of 48% of alumnae-respondents reported acceptance for transfer into four-year programs at an annual average of 16 in-state (Penna.); 1 'foreign'; and 24 out-of-state universities, for an annual average of 41. Over this 10-year period, the annual number of institutions accepting Harcum graduates for advanced-standing transfers ranged from a 'low' of 22 to a 'high' of 65. And over the past 15 years, in excess of 400 colleges/universities have indicated to the College that they would accept Harcum credits for transfer when the grade levels earned were appropriate and enrollment vacancies existed at the time of transfer application.

Clearly then, Harcum transfer curricula have been adjudged to be acceptable basic preparation for the pursuit of baccalaureate and graduate-level degrees by a substantial number of other higher education institutions, both in Pennsylvania and elsewhere throughout the country.

Realistically, it must be noted that these statistics reflect a <u>conservative</u> estimate only. Years of experience have revealed that it is literally impossible to obtain complete feed-back information. For example, during this decade, an annual average of only 52% of each Harcum graduating class has responded to the college's annual, first- year alumnae questionnaire survey. This fact, alone, unquestionably 'depresses' the total successful advanced-standing transfers reported for the individual classes.

A second 'under-reporting' factor which further 'depresses' successful transfer-articulation statistics is the exasperating fact that some colleges/universities simply fail to furnish transfer-acceptance information, even though courteously requested on a return-reply card!! This is a known fact, for feed-back information from individual Harcum graduates, (including their other-school transcripts to verify their claims), have regretably revealed,

in numberous cases, that the institution to which they transferred did not respond to Harcum's request to verify the advanced-standing transfer-acceptance of the particular Harcum graduate.

It has been said that the living history of a college will be found in the achievements of its graduates. In the particular dimension of transfer articulation, the 'living history' of Harcum graduates over this recent-past academic decade has been an impressive, albeit conservatively-reported, 48% annually of alumnae respondents. Their Harcum-earned academic credentials were accepted at an annual average of 41 other collegiate institutions.

In recent years the College also posed the question: "In general, how does the academic performance of Harcum graduates at 4-year colleges/universities compare with their Harcum academic records?" To generate data which could help answer this question, alumnae were invited to advise the Research Office at the College of baccalaureate degrees earned, and their baccalaureate cumulative averages. A self-selecting sample of 72 reponded by the end of academic 1977-78. The information they furnished does permit a cautiously encouraging conclusion. In general, these graduates experienced academic 'success', as evidenced by the cumulative averages they earned elsewhere than Harcum.

Among the 18 respondents who reported earning BA degrees, their average of their collective cumulative averages earned was 2.75 at Harcum and 2.77 at the other institutions. In addition, 4 of these respondents indicated that they had earned masters degrees, with 3 additional advising that they were doctoral candidates.

Within the group of 54 who earned BS degrees, the average of their Harcum graduations cumulative grade-point averages was 2.92, and it was 3.02 at the other colleges/ universities. Among these respondents, 12 advised that they had earned masters degrees, and that 2 were doctoral candidates.

In summary - some 61% of the BA respondents earned higher cumulative

baccalaureate averages than their Harcum averages, and 70% of the BS respondents did likewise.

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Turning to another major objective of the College, to what extent has the College helped prepare individuals for their initial articulation into the world of work? Over this decade the College has amassed a substantial amount of follow-up information from Harcum graduates. It would be both repetitious and unnecessarily detailed to cite all of the data generated. Some representative examples of the types of information collected annually follow:

(1) Regarding the 'success' of Harcum secretarial program graduates, a practical outcome for those students graduating from this curriculum is revealed in the results of a survey among 1969-1971 graduates. Some 58% reported and among them 90% indicated immediate employment upon Harcum graduation, with beginning salaries ranging from $400 to %600 monthly.

(2) Without reference to specific programs of study, the annual follow-up questionnaire survey among alumnae which is conducted during the summer immediately following their graduation reveals that in terms of immediate post-Harcum employment, the College has consistently been quite effective in the vocational preparation of its students. During this decade an annual average of 35% of the respondents reported successful employment upon graduation; ranging from 20% to 52%. Again, it is noted that these must be considered as conservative estimates only.

It is therefore apparent that between the successful advanced-standing transfer graduates (48% annually), and the successful immediate employment graduates (35% annually), a very substantial 83% of those responding to the annual alumnae surveys effected immediate post-Harcum vocational/educational articulations. Of the remaining 17%, some 'vacation' and do not seek immediate employment or further schooling. Others marry, and some undoubtedly seek employment and/or advanced-standing transfers at the time of the surveys.

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Among the targeted objectives of the College it ... "offers a balance of general and career-oriented courses in programs of study". Does it? As a matter of long-standing policy the College has firmly believed that general education and education for a career are compatible; that specialized skills-

vocational courses and general education (liberal arts) courses can complement each other in a program of broad-gauged, collegiate education. The extent to which this educational philosophy is 'translated' into specific courses offerings of the Behavioral Science, Business and Retail Merchandising, Humanities, and Science and Mathematics Divisions within the various programs of study offered, is evident in the fact that in those few instances where the Behavioral Science, Humanities, and Science & Mathematics Divisions are not represented by required courses, (only 4 out of 26 curriculums), available electives provide the student the opportunity to select courses in these three divisions.

The general education courses, expressed as a percentage of the total number of courses included in each career-oriented curriculum, (defined here as each program of study from which the graduate may immediately enter employment in that occupation without further schooling), are summarized below:

Table 1: Percentage of General Education Courses in Career-Oriented Curricula

Animal Center mgt. = 58%
Animal Technician - 95%
Art = 100%
Business Administration = 45%
Child Study = 100%
Commercial Art = 100%
Dental Assistant = 85%
Dramatic Arts = 100%
Exec. Secretary = 40%
Fashion Design = 70%
Interior Design = 100%
Legal Secretary = 24%
Medical Assistant = 55%
Med. Lab. Technician = 100%
Medical Secretary = 45%
Med. Technology = 100%
Optometric Technician = 90%
Pre-Nursing = 100%
Public Relations = 50%
Real Estate = 15%
Recreational Leadership = 100%
Retail Merchandising = 44%
Soc. Svs./Human Svs. = 100%
Special Education = 100%
Tourism /Travel = 16%

These Harcum curriculums are subject to ongoing review, and are updated periodically to reflect changes in job content in the various occupational areas for which the College prepares its graduates. In addition, there is further evidence that the content of Harcum programs is appropriate educational preparation for the variety of occupational fields involved. During the past decade some 641 Harcum graduates anonymously responded to the statement... "Believe Harcum prepared me for the field I have chosen". Their assessments:

Very Helpful = 379
Somewhat Helpful = 188
Not Helpful = 70

These responses reveal that only 11% indicated a less-than helpful evaluation, with a very substantial 89% evaluating their Harcum programs as being helpful.

Harcum's curricular relevancy is predicated upon its fundamental educational philosophy of offering both general education and career-oriented courses, for the link between post-secondary education and the world of work continues to be a major concern of the College. This area received ongoing attention at the college. During the past decade a records analysis among a sample of 500 graduates revealed that 8 out of each 10 had remained with their initial career program choice throughout their Harcum studies.

Undoubtedly a contributing reason for this high degree of stability in remaining with selected curriculums is Harcum's insistence that each program of study be geared, to the maximam extent feasible, to the development of skills having inter-occupational transferability. This particular approach has permitted the development of curriculums designed to insure basic competencies in mathematics, language-communications, and skills in interpersonal behavior. In combination, these primary competencies are important to the satisfactory performance of tasks which are found in a wide variety of vocations that successful graduates may enter. In brief - the College strongly believes that its graduates acquire generalizable competencies which equip them to directly enter the world of work or to successfully continue their formal schooling.

An in-depth follow-up evaluation among a random sample of 100 recent-year (1971-1975) career program graduates revealed the following:

1- Harcum education, as preparation for further education, received an Above Average assessment from 73% of the respondents.
2- A majority (51%) indicated that their current employment was well related to their program of study, while less than one-third reported unrelated employment.
3- The degree to which their first job upon graduation was related to their Harcum program of study is revealed by the following: Extremely well related = 20%; Quite related = 17%; Somewhat related = 26%; Not related = 37%.

4- A majority (64%) indicated that they considered their Harcum education to have been a distinct asset in helping them obtain and perform their first job after graduation, and

5- Some 91% of the respondents would recommend their Harcum curriculum to their friends indicating that Harcum graduates of recent years approve of their junior college schooling.

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Perhaps one of the most practical indicators of how well a college is able to attract and hold students is to be found in the oft-discussed 'drop-out' rate. The stark facts are - if a student drops out, an educational plan has failed. For one or more reasons, the College and the student are no longer pulling together to achieve the same goal. There has been some waste of time, treasure, and human talent; and neither the student nor the College have benefited from the dropout experience.

At Harcum, student 'holding power' is consistently high, and there are three sets of facts to back up this claim. First - there is the matter of student withdrawal during the course of the academic year. Since 1962, when this rate of withdrawal was 15% of the year-beginning enrollment, such withdrawals have averaged less than 7.5% annually. And for the past five years it has been a very low 5.4% annually!

A second clear fact supporting Harcum's high holding power record is the rate of return among first year students invited to come back for their second year at Harcum. This rate has averaged a very high 77% over the past decade - a record that few other comparable colleges can report.

Third - and perhaps most dramatic of these three, are the results of a national survey by the American Council of Education. This revealed that 62% of the two-year college studetns, nationally, drop out before graduation. At Harcum, over the past ten years, only 42$ who entered failed to graduate! Yes - Harcum's student holding power is high!

Another important dimension of educational outcomes is discussed in a Harcum institutional research study entitled "Harcum Helps Close Critical Thinking Gap". As the report notes, it has long been recognized that the abil-

ity to think critically is a desirable educational outcome. A number of experimental studies at colleges and other schooling levels have demonstrated that critical thinking can at least be improved as a result of training directed to this end.

A follow-up inquiry among a random sample of 60 Harcum students revealed an average improvement of thirty points in the five abilities measured by the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal instrument. Statistical analysis revealed that this was a significantly 'real' difference. It was therefore concluded that for this sample, typically representative of Harcum students, their two-year stay at Harcum was associated with a substantial improvement in their critical thinking skills as measured by the Watson-Glaser Appraisal.

Still another educational outcome of the Harcum experience is to be found in the sphere of student-life. At Harcum, student counseling is a 'way of life' for faculty, staff personnel, and administrators. This is to say that beyond identifying close student/faculty interaction in a policy statement, it is, in fact, an important, integral part of student life at the College. It is a pervasive and clearly apparent characteristic of the Harcum scene, and undoubtedly is a major contributing factor to the exceptionally low student attrition which the College has experienced over the past decade.

The high degree of importance Harcum students have placed upon this key interpersonal relationship behavior is revealed in the results of an anonymous student survey in the mid-seventies. They rated Student/Teacher interaction their ... "most valued Harcum experience." In addition, faculty members in their responses to another questionnaire survey, answered that question; "What do you think students would want you to do and be?" by selecting the answer ... "Be available to them for individual conferences" and the second-highest ranked answer among thirteen items; exceeded only by, "Know my subject matter".

It was, and is, abundantly clear that individual student attention continues to be a very real part of the daily activities of Harcum staff. faculty,

and administrators. Although the counseling program at the College has a wide range of content, the most important, continuous theme emphasized is to provide for each student a climate of acceptance so that she feels free to:

... bring a problem or concern to a member of the college community, and
... that in a spirit of mutual trust, a problem can be resolved.

Another institutional research report entitled "Harcum Developmental Reading Program 'Results': presents convincing evidence of educational outcomes beneficial, particularly, to students experiencing reading difficulties. Recognizing the importance of reading skills proficiency for effective learning, Harcum has offered a reading development program for freshmen since 1966. Two follow-up studies among 51 freshmen in 1972 and 83 in 1974 revealed improvements in Vocabulary and Comprehension for some 98% of the former group and 86% among the latter group, as measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. Both of these improvements were found to be statistically significant.

Yet another set of analyses over the past five years of grade distributions have indicated that students who spend their second year at Harcum attain higher cumulative averages than studetns who complete only one year at the College. This overall grade improvement of senior students reflects the academic growth of students who return to Harcum for their second year. This suggests that it is more advantageous for a student to remain at Harcum for two years than to limit her stay to only one. A dramatic corroboration of this conclusion is to be found in the results of a questionnaire survey among 305 former Harcum students. This revealed:

...Harcum graduates successfully completed 4-year college programs at a rate 130% greater than one-year dropouts: (50% vs. 21%). In other words, the chances of Harcum graduates succeeding in 4-year colleges is more than twice as great as the chances for one-year dropouts.

...Harcum graduates dropped out of 4-year colleges at a rate 68% less than the one-year dropouts. In other words, the 4-year college dropouts from among Harcum graduates were at a rate three times less than that for Harcum

one-year dropouts.

One final alumnae questionnaire survey in the mid-seventies which reported responses from some 439 Harcum graduates indicated a widespread sentiment among them that a Harcum education is both desirable and valuable. Some 80% stated they would ..."recommend Harcum to a friend seeking to select a junior college to attend". And 70% reported being employed in the field in which they prepared at Harcum. (Among the most recent graduation class - 1978 - some 94% of the 164 respondents reported immediate employment upon graduation or advanced-standing transfer acceptance.

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How well then has Harcum been achieving its objectives? This report suggests one general conclusion: in the main, when the College is 'tested' by its products; i.e. the articulation of its graduates into the community at large, it has evidenced a record of effective results.

Mrs. Edith Harcum, the College's founder, was a remarkably far-sighted individual. She believed that those she undertook to educate must have a general education as well as an occupational skill. Attesting to its vigor and timeliness, this basic policy continues at the College, some 64 years after its founding!

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